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ABSTRACT

Courses in recreation curriculum in the United States assist in preparing graduates to fill a variety of leisure service positions. This study was undertaken in an effort to determine whether the current administration course content accurately reflects the elements that practitioners feel are important. Information gathered in a national survey of syllabi from recreation administration courses is compared to the reaction by recreation practitioners in respect to learning items necessary for entering professionals. Recreation program administrators in public, corporate, and commercial/resort arenas were surveyed. Common learning items used by institutions are reflected along with the perception of various practitioners. Conclusions indicate that the subject matter covered in the majority of the recreation administration courses is appropriate and beneficial. The survey identified a few areas of concern which recreation educators should take into consideration in designing their courses. (Author)

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A Practical Approach to Developing Recreation Administration Courses

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ABSTRACT: Courses in recreation curriculums in the U.S. assist in preparing graduates to fill a variety of leisure service positions. This study was undertaken in an effort to determine whether the current administration course content accurately reflect the elements that practitioners feel are important. Information gathered in a national survey of syllabi from recreation administration courses is compared to the reaction by recreation practitioners in respect to learning items necessary for entering professionals. Recreation program administrators in public, corporate, and commercial/resort arenas were surveyed. Common learning items used by institutions are reflected along with the perception of various practitioners. Conclusions indicate that the subject matter covered in the majority of the recreation administration courses is appropriate and beneficial. The survey identified a few areas of concern which recreation educators should take into consideration in designing their courses.

KEYWORDS: Recreation education, administration course, learning item, practitioners, course development.

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Introduction

Traditionally developed academic programs in recreation education have emphasized recreation administration, park management, leadership and programming. Today's academic programs in leisure services are more diverse, including the specialty areas of therapeutic recreation, outdoor recreation, recreation administration, recreation resource management, commercial recreation, travel and tourism, and fitness, among others. Each approaches the preparation of entry level professionals from a slightly different perspective.

As the demands on the leisure education field have changed so have the challenges for academic programs in recreation. Challenges for the future were highlighted in a AALR presentation in 1983 titled "Recreation in Higher Education: Survival in the 80's"(Mobley, 1983). This presentation emphasizes the importance of generating new ideas and the abilities to implement plans to address challenges faced by colleges. Two common challenges that face college and university recreation programs today are budget reductions and declining enrollments.

Diminishing enrollments are real to leisure studies programs. Studies have indicated enrollment declines of 34% in four-year undergraduate degree programs (Gitelson, 1985). The same study indicated institutions were providing expanded options for students in B.S./B.A. programs. Because of the need to diversify and the sudden changes this diversification has brought, it may be reasonable to question the appropriateness of traditional approaches to professional preparation in the leisure industry.

The challenge of the 80's, and beyond, may be the need to supply adequately trained professionals for the deversified field. While

there appears to be a declining pool of appropriately trained professionals, the field is becoming more diverse and expanding in size. The issue of diversification and the need for adequately trained professionals was raised at a recent NRPA Symposium on Leisure Research. Zito (1985) indicated faculty seek to make their courses exciting, challenging, yet practical to the student while meeting the demands of an expanding field. Zito goes on to emphasize the need for interaction between educators and practitioners reflecting the educational value of "real world" experiences. In serving the desires of students while meeting the needs of the field, existing courses must adapt and prosper through productive practical changes.

Faculty in smaller academic programs experience special problems. Dilemmas being faced include students seeking specific programs or courses to meet their interest and future employment goals; and academic programs which do not meet rapidly changing student interests. This may be due to lack of institutional growth, or stagnation, inflexibility of staff to retrain, or budget reductions, among other reasons. The generality that the complexities of society and the desires of students will continue to place increasing demands for change on academic programs is certain.

Traditional recreation curriculums recognize students' interests in other leisure service areas, notibly commercial/resort and corporate leisure service programs. Perhaps due to staff/faculty restrictions the academic program will not expand significantly into these areas. These types of programs must carefully strive to fulfill basic educational core requirements set forth by the NRPA/AALR Council on Accreditation. To meet the challenge of diversification the

recreation program must develop an adaptable program within the existing educational core.

The University of Delaware's Recreation and Parks Department has developed a common core of courses based upon NRPA/AALR standards. Option areas emphasize specific leisure service concentrations. Many of the standards included in The Council's document which describes the professional education core are included in the following courses: foundations, leadership, programming, and recreation administration. In addition, there is continued examination of the existing core and option area courses, to assure they meet accepted guidelines established by the University and it's accrediting bodies and other certifying organizations.

According to the SPRE Curriculum Catalogue (1985), it was determined that one of the most common courses offered is recreation administration. Usually the administration course is one of the last taken prior to graduation. It was determined by the Recreation Curriculum at the University of Delaware to investigate whether or not the content of it's own Administration course was adaptable to a changing field. A study was proposed to investigate this problem.

The Study

The recreation administration course at the University of Delaware emerged from the public/quasi-public arena. Discoveries had to be made reflecting learning items which would support students interested in other areas of leisure service, such as commercial/resort and corporate leisure services, and not only represent the public field.

An early suggestion was to provide students with a business orientation by making accessible courses within the College of Business. If similar to the University of Delaware, other institutions may find it difficult for their students to enroll in courses usually limited to business majors or enroll in a business course which may be current to the needs of the recreation professional but not geared to the recreation student.

An investigation was made to to collect information and design a recreation administration course that would be more adaptable to students with various professional recreation interests. Information from recreation education programs and recreation practitioners were compared.

The investigation took place in three phases. The first phase involved identification of existing topics included in texts and current recreation administration courses at four year undergraduate institutions. The second phase was to survey practitioners to evaluate learning items identified in the first stage. The third phase was an analysis of the information collected in the first two phases to determine the degree of agreement between the material being presented to students and the entry level knowledge which practitioners indicated as necessary for the young professional.

Phase one included the review of major texts used for recreation administration courses, and the identification of major topics or "learning items" included in each text. A "learning item" was considered to be any significant body of organized information which was applied specifically to leisure studies or recreation. Examples of texts examined were Kraus and Curtis's Creative Administration in

Recreation and Parks(1986), Hjelte and Shivers Public Administration of Recreation Services(1980), and Howard and Crompton's Financing, Managing, and Marketing Recreation and Park Resources(1980). Most of these texts contained chapters or major sections on management theory, motivation, organizational structure, legal foundations, organizational leadership, budgeting and fiscal management, personnel management, public relations and program administration. Figure 1 indicates twenty items identified from these texts.

The next portion of phase one was to expand the list of learning items. To accomplish this, recreation administration course syllabi were reviewed. Requests were made to 244 four-year recreation programs. Institutions were selected through the review of the American Alliance for Leisure and Recreation Curriculum Guide (AAHPERD, 1983). Syllabi for leadership, programming, and foundations or introductory courses were also requested to provide an indication of the type of support provided for the recreation administration course. Phase one was completed by evidence of a generated list of learning items as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

RANKED lEARNING ITEMS FROM SURVEY OF INSTITUTIONS

	Rank Order by % Ed. Inst.
*Personnel Management	89
*Management Theory and Admin. Process	85
*Budgeting and Fiscal Management	84
*Organization Structures	76
*Legal Foundations	63
*Public Relations	62
*Organizational Leadership	59
*Legislative Authority	53
*Evaluation	45
*Boards and Commissions	45
*Policy Development	40
*Program Planning and Administration	36
*Facility Mgmt and Operations	36
*Comm. Networking and Organizational Mgmt.	32
*Motivation	31
*Marketing	30
*Problem Solving	30
*Comprehensive Planning	28
*Operations Systems Management	24
*Computerization	20
Job Preparation	16
Office Management	14
Cooperative Efforts	13
Management and Administrative Trends	13
Volunteer Services	9
Inter-personal Relations	8
Community Influences	7
Management Training	5
Stress Management	3
Security	2
Contractual Services	2

*Learning items identified through review of texts.

The second phase included input from practitioners in the leisure service field. Administrators in public, corporate, and commercial/resort leisure services were identified and asked to rate the learning items generated from phase one on a five point Likert scale; one indicating a low priority of importance and a five a high priority. Membership addresses were collected from the National Employee Services and Recreation Association (NESRA), from the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association (RCRA), and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), from which a listing of community recreation departments was requested. A random sampling was made of all practitioners proportional to the size of the total membership base in each organization. The full membership of these organization includes others who serve in non-administrative roles; only those identified as practitioners serving in an administrative capacity were mailed the survey questionnaire. As a result 35 corporate , 26 resort; and 243 public leisure service administrators were included in the survey, or approximately 18% of the available population.

The third phase was an analysis of the first two phases. A process by which the learning items being taught in recreation administration courses were compared to the learning items that recreation professionals consider important for entry level knowledge.

Results

In the first phase, of the 244 requests mailed to academic institutions, 115 replied for a 47% rate of return. Twenty-eight syllabi were not used, either due to incomplete information, being directed at one specific option area such as resource management or

therapeutic recreation; or discontinuance of the recreation program. Usable syllabi totaled 87. At the time of data collection 47 institutions had been accredited by NRPA, course syllabi was received from 36 of those institutions. Following a review of syllabi from the academic programs, the original list of learning items was increased from 20 to 31. Figure 1 indicates the ranking and frequency distribution by percent for each learning item included in recreation administration courses from the usable responses.

The second phase asked practitioners to evaluate the importance of each of the 31 learning items. The response rates by practitioners were: resort/commercial - 62%, corporate - 61%, and public - 56%. An average response ranging from one to five was obtained for each learning item; a five showing greater importance, a one indicating less importance. Figure 2 indicates the average response for each of the three groups of practitioners, and shows the average response or grand mean for all professionals.

Findings

The result of the initial stage was interesting, but inconclusive. Through analysis of the syllabi in administration courses a frequency of learning items used was generated. Figure 1 indicates the item and frequency of inclusion by institution. This suggests which learning items are taught most often. The syllabi indicated that courses could have been taught in one of the following manners: through problem solving, competency system, or lecture and discussion.

Figure 2

AVERAGE RANKED RESPONSES BY PRACTITIONERS

Learning Item	GRAND MEAN	RCRA	NESRA	NRPA
*Budgeting and Fiscal Management	4.50	4.52	4.64	4.21
*Public Relations	4.43	4.49	4.27	4.07
*Program Planning and Administration	4.42	4.40	4.73	4.36
*Facility Management and Operations	4.23	4.32	4.18	3.57
*Motivation	4.18	4.21	4.55	3.71
Management Training	4.17	4.13	4.73	4.07
*Marketing	4.15	4.16	4.55	3.79
*Comprehensive Planning	4.14	4.21	3.91	3.79
*Communication Networking	4.08	4.12	3.91	3.93
*Problem Solving	4.08	4.08	4.82	3.57
*Legal Foundations	4.07	4.05	4.36	4.00
*Evaluation	4.01	4.02	4.09	3.86
Office Management	3.99	3.98	4.09	3.93
Volunteer Services	3.99	4.03	3.55	4.00
Community Influences	3.96	4.08	3.55	3.36
Inter-personal Relations	3.91	3.91	4.09	3.71
Job Preparation	3.88	3.90	4.09	3.57
*Personnel Management	3.87	3.92	3.27	3.86
*Policy Development	3.87	3.95	3.55	3.43
*Computerization	3.81	3.89	3.55	3.36
*Management Theory	3.78	3.82	3.82	3.43
*Organizational Structures	3.76	3.91	3.09	3.07
Stress Management	3.73	3.75	4.18	3.14
Cooperative Efforts	3.68	3.74	3.27	3.50
Security	3.66	3.72	3.18	3.57
Contractual Services	3.58	3.63	3.45	3.21
Administrative Trends	3.49	3.50	2.91	3.43
*Boards and Commissions	3.42	3.57	2.64	2.79
*Organizational Leadership	3.42	4.08	3.82	3.57
*Operations and Systems Mgmt	3.32	3.37	3.00	3.14
*Legislative Authority	3.22	3.32	2.64	2.86

*Learning items identified through review of texts.

Learning items can be descriptively compared by the response of practitioners and institutions. Figure 1 reflects the order and the frequency response by institution. Figure 2 ranks the order of average responses from practitioners. A comparison demonstrates the discrepancy between specific items. For example, "personnel management" and "management theory" ranks first and second based upon institution response, but ranked 19 and 18 respectively by practitioners. Management training, ranked 28th by academia, was ranked within the first fifth of all items by practitioners. Legislative Authority, Boards and Commissions, and Legal Foundations were ranked in the first ten by academic institution and ranked in the last one-third by practitioners.

The ten leading learning items of each group are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

RANKED LEARNING ITEMS BY INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTITIONERS

Institutions	Practitioners
Personnel Management	Program Administration
Management Theory	Budgeting/Fiscal Mgmt
Budgeting/Fiscal Mgmt	Public Relations
Organization Structure	Motivation
Legal Foundations	Maintenance Operations
Public Relations	Management Training
Organizational Leadership	Comprehensive Planning
Legislative Authority	Marketing
Evaluation	Problem Solving
Boards and Commissions	Communication Networking

Through observation of practitioner responses, there is similarity between the first ten items ranked by public practitioners and those ranked by resort and corporate practitioners. The greatest difference among practitioners response was for "personnel management" by public vs. commercial/resort practitioners. Since data among practitioners was collected by similar methods a statistical comparison was made.

The comparison between the groups of practitioners was used to determine which learning item, or group of items could be distinguished from other learning items from among the groups of practitioners. This can allow institutions to systematically include specific learning items in an administration course geared especially for one of the leisure service areas used in the study.

Due to the common nature of the learning items being treated as a entire unit the effects of the relation of those learning items had to be limited. This allowed for a easier analysis and eventually a comparison between groups of practitioners. The procedure used grouped the learinig items and limited the differences that would normally result when predictions would be made between groups of practitioners.

The grouping procedure, multicollinearity, allows the learning items to be grouped accurately and therefore avoid an unnaturally high tolerance level. The procedure implements a partial comparison, or correlation, between items to select common groupings and provide a means for further analysis. As a result specific items could be analyzed based upon their common relation to each other. As a result of this step the following groupings were developed as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

GROUPED LEARNING ITEMS

Group 1:
Organizational Structure
Community Networking
Marketing
Facility Management
Program Planning
Community Influence

Group 2:
Organization Structure
Marketing
Budgeting
Personnel Management

Group 3
Boards and Commiss.
Job Preparation

Group 4:
Motivation
Problem Solving
Facility Management
Cooperative Efforts
Community Influence

The next step was to statistically compare learning items and discover which items, or groups of items, could distinguish differences among the three groups of practitioners. This was completed utilizing the Fischer Linear Discriminate Function Analysis. This procedure identifies relationships between learning items and practitioners, or qualitative criterion variables and quantitative predictor variables. It determines which group of items may contribute to differences between the three groups of professionals. The possibility existed for variables to be produced in a way to distinguish among the following combinations of professionals:

commercial vs. corporate and public;
commercial and corporate vs. public;
commercial and public vs. corporate;
commercial vs. corporate vs. public.

As a result of these procedures applied to the learning items in Figure 4 the following was determined:

> The variables (learning items) in groups 1 and 2 can be distinguished between one another based upon the responses between practitioners in commercial/resort, and practitioners in the public leisure field.
>
> Variables (learning items) in groups 3 and 4 can be distinguished between one another based upon the responses between practitioners in commercial/resort field, and practitioners in corporate and public field.

This indicates there is significant difference in the way the administrators, in the cited groups, viewed the learning items. In the first instance there was a difference between administrators in the public and commercial sectors, but not the corporate sector. The second instance indicates differences between administrators in the commercial/resort sector and collectively those administrators in corporate and public sectors.

Another finding reflects aspects of text content. The ranking of learning items by educational institution indicates that the items identified from texts were ranked above those suggested by academic institutions. Eleven of the first twelve learning items ranked by practitioners were included in the initial text survey. (see figs. 1 & 2)

Summary

There is some agreement between practitioners and educators reflecting which learning items they believe are "most important" in a recreation administration course. The learning items identified through syllabi interpretation, and rated by practitioners for inclusion in a recreation administration course, may indicate that the

items should be seriously considered for use in a recreation administration course. Upon further observation of Figures 1 & 2 some differences are noticed. If, for example, the ranking of the first ten learning items from educational institutions are measured against those ranked by administrators only two; # 3, Budgeting and #6, Public Relations, fall within the same range. If the acceptable range is expanded to 50% of the learning items, then those ranked by practitioners within the same range increases to nine, a 60% agreement.

Institutions which plan a recreation administration course for a specific area in the leisure service industry, ie. resorts, should note specifically the order of importance given to learning items by that group of practitioners. The grand mean, or total average as shown in Figure 2 reflects the order of importance of learning items as indicated by all practitioners. Academic programs may wish to utilize this information in planning an administration course adaptable for a range of student needs.

Texts seem to reflect adequate information. Learning items taken from the text review were commonly found on course syllabi, however academic programs may be restricting themselves to learning items reflected within texts. This information identifies the need for a "bridge" to occur between publishers, institutions, educators, and practitioners.

The statistical comparison allowed for a more concise determination of learning items specific to one of the three groups of practitioners. The means developed from the survey of practitioners and the resulting comparisons and grouping of learning items were

based upon similarities among responses from practitioners. This process simply shows which items, or group of items, should be treated and/or presented differently in a recreation administration course depending upon the area of concentration. (For an accurate representation refer to figures 1 & 2).

This study may offer insight for the improvement of recreation administration courses. The recreation administration course is one of several courses in the recreation curriculum. Skills for an entering professional are developed through work experiences, contact with practitioners and through other courses. But, it is often the recreation administration course which offers the "finishing touches" for the recreation student, and where knowledge, experience, and maturity culminate.

If educators are to adequately prepare entry level professionals, they must continue to make appropriate changes in courses. New texts should be developed, articles written, research completed and discussions continue between educators and leisure service professionals. For academic programs in leisure studies continue to improve and expand as they have in the past, the practitioner must play a vital role in the future development of courses. It is the practitioner who finally assess the skills and knowledge of the recreation graduate through employment or nonemployment. The core courses in a leisure service curriculum must reflect the current demands and needs of the recreation field plus supply the student adequate knowledge for additional courses.

The findings of this survey serve as a stepping stone. Academic programs in leisure studies and recreation will rely on the success of appropriately educated and prepared entry level professionals. These

same professionals will shape the field and may act as a guiding force in future academic development. For a course to become purposeful to the students it must have merit in practical application. Hence there is a need for practitioners input.

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